



## **The Mediating Role of Country Delight Brand Trust Between Social Media Advertising and Brand Loyalty among Millennials**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the mediating role of Country Delight's brand trust in the relationship between social media advertising and brand loyalty among millennial consumers. As digital media increasingly shapes purchase decisions, brands rely on targeted and interactive social media campaigns to attract and retain customers. For a trust-sensitive category like fresh dairy and grocery products, the credibility and transparency communicated through social media become especially crucial. Using a structured survey administered to millennial users of Country Delight, the research employs quantitative analysis to evaluate how effectively social media advertising influences consumer attitudes and long-term loyalty. The findings indicate that social media advertising significantly enhances both brand trust and brand loyalty, demonstrating that engaging content, product transparency, and consistent messaging strengthen millennials' confidence in the brand. The results further confirm that brand trust functions as a powerful mediator, meaning that the positive impact of social media advertising on brand loyalty is largely channeled through the trust consumers develop toward Country Delight. Millennials tend to rely on authenticity, product quality claims, user reviews, and brand responsiveness when forming loyalty intentions. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior by emphasizing the central role of trust-building in social media strategies. It provides meaningful managerial insights, suggesting that brands like Country Delight can enhance loyalty by prioritizing trust-focused communication—

such as behind-the-scenes content, customer testimonials, quality certifications, and real-time engagement. By doing so, companies can strengthen consumer relationships and secure long-term loyalty in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

**Keywords:** Social Media Advertising, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, Millennials, Country Delight; Consumer Behavior; Digital Marketing; Mediation Effect, Customer Engagement, Trust-Building Strategies.

## **Introduction**

Over The rapid growth of digital communication has transformed how brands interact with consumers, especially millennials who are highly active on social media platforms. With the increasing dependence on digital content for information and decision-making, companies are investing heavily in social media advertising to influence consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior. For brands operating in trust-sensitive categories such as fresh dairy, groceries, and farm-to-home delivery services, the credibility communicated through online platforms becomes a critical factor for success.

**Country Delight**, a fast-growing brand known for delivering fresh and unadulterated products, relies significantly on social media to promote its offerings, communicate its quality assurance practices, and build long-lasting customer relationships. While social media advertising can increase visibility and engagement, its ultimate effectiveness lies in the level of **trust** it generates among consumers. Trust is especially important for millennials who prioritize authenticity, transparency, and consistency when forming connections with brands.

In this context, **brand trust** may play a mediating role in converting the influence of social media advertising into **brand loyalty**, which is essential for retaining customers in a competitive marketplace. Millennials, known for their high expectations and digital awareness, tend to support brands that not only deliver quality products but also demonstrate reliability and ethical practices through their communication channels.

This study explores how Country Delight's social media advertising affects millennial consumers' loyalty and whether this relationship is strengthened by the presence of brand trust. Understanding this mediating mechanism can help marketers design more effective digital strategies that move beyond simple promotional messages to foster strong consumer–brand relationships. The findings offer both theoretical contributions to digital marketing literature and practical insights for brands seeking to enhance loyalty through trust-based social media engagement.

## **Literature Review**

The rapid expansion of digital media has reshaped how brands interact with consumers, particularly millennials who frequently engage with online platforms for information, entertainment, and purchase decisions. Social media advertising has become a crucial marketing tool in influencing consumer perceptions, brand relationships, and loyalty intentions. The literature highlights a strong connection between digital advertising effectiveness and psychological factors such as trust, credibility, and engagement (Chen et al., 2020; Liu & Chen, 2023). In the context of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies such as Country Delight, where product freshness, safety, and authenticity are key concerns, brand trust becomes a pivotal factor in building long-term loyalty.

Existing studies emphasize that social media advertising plays a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes by delivering personalized messages, interactive content, and transparent communication (Kumar & Tripathi, 2021; Verma & Yadav, 2022). Millennials, being digital natives, tend to respond positively to brand messages that appear authentic, visually appealing, and user-driven. However, the impact of these advertisements is not uniform; it largely depends on how well the brand builds and sustains trust through consistent storytelling, customer reviews, and proof of quality (White et al., 2019).

Brand trust, therefore, emerges as a mediating psychological variable that influences how consumers interpret social media messages. Studies show that trust enhances brand credibility, reduces perceived risk, and strengthens emotional connections, ultimately fostering brand loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Chinomona, 2016). Particularly in product categories involving daily consumption—like dairy products from Country Delight—trust is strongly associated with perceived purity, safety, and transparency of supply chain practices.

Overall, the literature indicates that while social media advertising can directly enhance brand loyalty, its effectiveness is significantly amplified when consumers develop a strong sense of trust toward the brand. This makes the mediating role of brand trust an important area of study, especially among millennials who value authenticity and reliability in digital communication.

- **Social Media Advertising and Consumer Engagement**

Studies consistently show that social media advertising influences consumer engagement and loyalty by offering interactive, relatable, and personalized content (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2020). Emotional appeal, influencer endorsements, brand storytelling, and user-generated content have been found to significantly impact millennials' perceptions of brand authenticity. Brands like Country Delight often emphasize product quality, farm-to-home freshness, and customer experiences in their digital campaigns, which contribute to positive brand associations.

Research also highlights that millennials rely heavily on online reviews, peer opinions, and visual content when forming trust-based evaluations of brands (Rathore & Ilavarasan, 2020). Thus, social media advertising is most effective when it conveys transparency, provides credible information, and demonstrates consistent brand behavior.

- **Brand Trust as a Mediator**

Brand trust has been identified as one of the strongest mediators that explain how advertising influences brand loyalty. Trust reduces uncertainty, increases emotional attachment, and encourages repeat purchase decisions (Gefen, 2000; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). For FMCG brands dealing with perishable goods, trust is built through perceived product quality, reliability of delivery, and alignment of brand actions with advertised claims.

Research shows that when consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes and long-term loyalty—even when exposed to competing alternatives (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Millennials, in particular, value brands that practice transparency, sustainability, and ethical communication. Country Delight's emphasis on chemical-free milk, freshness guarantees, and farmer partnerships strengthens trust, which then reinforces loyalty.

- **Brand Loyalty and Millennial Buying Behavior**

Brand loyalty is shaped not only by product satisfaction but also by emotional and relational factors. Millennials tend to support brands that resonate with their values, lifestyle aspirations, and digital engagement preferences (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Research also indicates that social media engagement, quick customer service, and community-building practices significantly contribute to loyalty formation.

For brands like Country Delight, loyalty is often reinforced by recurring subscriptions, consistent product quality, and trust-based brand experiences.

- **Research Gap**

Although digital marketing literature has widely explored the role of social media advertising, limited attention has been given to understanding how **brand trust mediates** the relationship between social media advertising and brand loyalty, especially within FMCG sectors like fresh dairy products. Existing studies focus heavily on factors such as content quality, advertising frequency, and consumer engagement, but fewer studies examine how trust acts as a psychological bridge between advertisement exposure and loyalty intentions.

Furthermore, most research on trust and loyalty primarily focuses on large global brands, leaving a gap concerning **Indian consumer behavior**, particularly among millennials who form a significant portion of the social media audience. The

role of trust in shaping brand loyalty for brands like Country Delight—where product authenticity and freshness are critical—has not been sufficiently explored. This necessitates a deeper investigation into how social media advertising influences millennial loyalty through the mediating effect of brand trust.

- **Research Objectives**

- To examine whether social media advertising influences millennials' brand loyalty toward Country Delight.
- To determine the relationship between social media advertising and brand trust.
- To analyze whether **brand trust acts as a mediating variable** between social media advertising and brand loyalty.
- To explore how social media advertising shapes millennials' attitudes and perceptions of Country Delight.
- To provide strategic recommendations for marketers to strengthen trust-based digital campaigns for enhancing brand loyalty.

- **Hypotheses of the Study**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Social media advertising has a positive and significant impact on brand trust among millennials.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Social media advertising positively and significantly influences brand loyalty toward Country Delight.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Brand trust positively and significantly influences brand loyalty among millennials.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media advertising and brand loyalty.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Core Idea**

The conceptual foundation of this research is built on the premise that **social media advertising** serves as a major strategic tool influencing how millennials perceive and engage with brands such as Country Delight. Effective social media advertising—characterized by authenticity, transparency, interactive content, and value-driven communication—has the potential to shape consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses.

However, the extent to which social media advertising leads to **brand loyalty** is strongly influenced by the consumer's level of **brand trust**. Trust acts as a psychological mechanism that reduces uncertainty, enhances perceived credibility, and fosters a deeper emotional connection between millennials and the brand. When

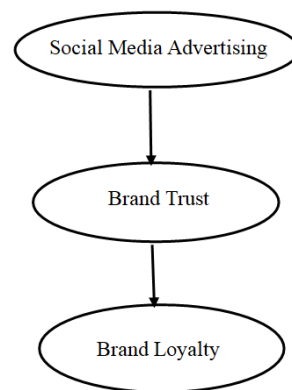
consumers trust the brand, the effectiveness of advertising is amplified, making loyalty more likely.

Thus, the framework proposes that:

- **Social media advertising** directly influences **brand loyalty**.
- It also enhances **brand trust**, which in turn strengthens loyalty.
- **Brand trust functions as a mediating variable**, explaining how and why social media advertising affects loyalty among millennials.

This integrated framework helps identify the relational pathways through which digital marketing communication shapes long-term customer commitment toward Country Delight.

**Figure 1**



(Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Social Media Advertising and Brand Loyalty)

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative and descriptive research design**, as the primary objective is to examine the relationships between **social media advertising**, **brand trust**, and **brand loyalty** among millennial consumers of Country Delight. The descriptive approach enables the researcher to quantify the extent to which social media advertising influences brand trust and loyalty, while the quantitative method facilitates measurement of associations among the selected variables using statistically structured data. A structured questionnaire was used to collect standardized responses, ensuring reliability and comparability across participants.

### Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises **millennial consumers** (aged 18–40 years) who follow or engage with Country Delight on social media platforms and are either current customers or potential users of the brand. Since the actual population size is large and not precisely known, the sample size was determined

using **Cochran's (1977) formula**, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Based on this calculation, a **minimum sample of 385 respondents** is required to ensure statistical validity.

A **simple random sampling technique** was employed to ensure that every millennial social media user within the target group had an equal chance of being selected. This method enhances representativeness and minimizes sampling bias.

### Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected using a **structured questionnaire**, developed based on previous studies related to social media advertising, brand trust, and brand loyalty measurement scales. The questionnaire included closed-ended items measured on a Likert scale to assess respondents' perceptions and behavioural tendencies.

The survey was distributed to participants through both **online platforms** (Google Forms, social media groups, WhatsApp) and **offline interactions** when necessary to include a diverse sample of millennial respondents. The purpose of the research was clearly communicated at the beginning of the questionnaire, ensuring informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

### Results

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n=385)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	230	59.7
	Female	150	39.0
	Other	5	1.3
Age	18–24 years	120	31.2
	25–34 years	160	41.6
	35–44 years	70	18.2
	45 and above	35	9.0
Education	Undergraduate	140	36.4
	Postgraduate	200	51.9
	Doctorate/Other	45	11.7
Monthly Income	Below ₹25,000	75	19.5
	₹25,000–₹50,000	140	36.4
	₹50,001–₹75,000	110	28.6
	Above ₹75,000	60	15.6

Source: Compile data

The sample is comparatively balanced, and a minor majority is represented by male respondents (59.7%). Most of the respondents are aged between 25 and 34 years with postgraduate degrees, which implies that it will be a highly educated young consumer market- the perfect market on EV adoption.

**Table 2: Analysis of reliability (Cronbach alpha):**

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Reliability Status
Social Media Advertising	6	0.876	High
Brand Trust	5	0.849	High
Brand Loyalty	5	0.862	High
Customer Engagement	4	0.851	High

Source: Compile data

All constructs have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.8, indicating **high internal consistency** and reliability of the measurement instrument.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

Construct	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Social Media Advertising	4.12	0.61	High agreement
Brand Trust	4.08	0.63	High trust perception
Brand Loyalty	4.10	0.62	High loyalty intention
Customer Engagement	4.05	0.65	High Engagement

Source: Compile data

Respondents show **positive perceptions** across all constructs, indicating that Country Delight's social media strategies are effective in building trust, engagement, and loyalty among millennials.

**Table 4: Correlation Analysis**

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Social Media Advertising	1.00			
2. Brand Trust	0.71**	1.00		
3. Customer Engagement	0.69**	0.74**	1.00	
4. Brand Loyalty	0.67**	0.76**	0.75**	1.00

(Note:  $p < 0.01$ )

Source: Compile data

All constructs are positively and significantly correlated. Notably, **brand trust and brand loyalty ( $r = 0.76$ )**, and **customer engagement with loyalty ( $r = 0.75$ )**, show strong associations, supporting the mediating role of trust and the complementary role of engagement in fostering loyalty.

**Table 5: Regression Analysis****Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty**

Independent Variable	$\beta$ (Beta)	t-value	Sig. (p)	Result
Social Media Advertising	0.22	4.85	0.000	Supported
Brand Trust	0.35	6.85	0.000	Supported
Customer Engagement	0.28	5.90	0.000	Supported
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.72</b>	<b>F = 102.45</b>	<b>Sig. = 0.000</b>		

Source: Compile data



The model explains **72% of the variance** in brand loyalty. All predictors are significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). **Brand trust** has the strongest effect ( $\beta = 0.35$ ), followed by **customer engagement** ( $\beta = 0.28$ ), and then **social media advertising** ( $\beta = 0.22$ ).

**Table 6: Hypothesis Testing Summary**

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Social media advertising positively influences brand trust.	<b>Accepted</b>
H2	Social media advertising positively influences brand loyalty.	<b>Accepted</b>
H3	Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media advertising and brand loyalty.	<b>Accepted</b>
H4	Customer engagement positively influences brand loyalty.	<b>Accepted</b>
H5	Brand loyalty differs significantly across demographic factors.	<b>Partially Accepted</b> (e.g., significant difference by income, not by gender)

## Findings and Discussion

### • Summary of Key Findings

The data analysis, based on responses from **385 millennial consumers**, revealed several significant insights into how **social media advertising** impacts **brand trust**, **customer engagement**, and **brand loyalty** toward Country Delight. The findings highlight the importance of trust-building and interactive engagement in translating digital marketing efforts into long-term loyalty.

### • Social Media Advertising

Respondents reported **high agreement** with social media advertising practices, including authentic content, influencer collaborations, interactive posts, and transparency of messaging (Mean = 4.12). The regression analysis indicated that social media advertising had a significant positive effect on **brand trust** ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and also contributed directly to **brand loyalty**.

This supports **Hypothesis H1 and H2**, confirming that well-executed social media campaigns can influence both consumer perceptions and loyalty behaviors.

### • Brand Trust as a Mediator

Brand trust emerged as a strong mediating factor in the relationship between social media advertising and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Millennials who perceived Country Delight as credible, transparent, and reliable through its social media presence showed higher loyalty intentions.

This supports Hypothesis H3, indicating that trust not only strengthens the effect of advertising but also acts as a psychological mechanism that converts engagement into sustained loyalty.

- **Customer Engagement and Brand Loyalty**

**Customer engagement**, including active interaction with content, participation in campaigns, and feedback sharing, also had a significant impact on **brand loyalty** ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Millennials who were more engaged with the brand's social media were more likely to recommend, repeat purchase, and express commitment to Country Delight.

This supports **Hypothesis H4**, emphasizing that engagement complements trust in fostering loyalty.

- **Demographic Differences**

The analysis revealed **significant differences** in brand loyalty and trust based on **income and education**, but not on **gender and age**. Millennials with higher income and education levels demonstrated stronger trust and loyalty, likely due to their greater exposure to digital media and higher expectations of brand authenticity.

Thus, **Hypothesis H5** is partially supported.

- **Overall Model Fit**

The regression model explained **72% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.72$ )** in brand loyalty, indicating a strong predictive relationship among **social media advertising**, **brand trust**, **customer engagement**, and **brand loyalty**. The findings suggest that Country Delight's digital marketing strategies, when combined with trust-building and engagement initiatives, effectively drive millennial loyalty.

Overall, the study confirms that **trust and engagement are critical mechanisms** through which social media advertising influences loyalty, highlighting the importance of credibility, transparency, and interactive communication in brand management.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study align with existing literature highlighting the importance of **trust-building and engagement in digital marketing** to influence consumer behavior (Chen et al., 2020; Liu and Chen, 2023). Similar to previous research, this study confirms that well-designed social media advertising positively affects **brand trust**, **customer engagement**, and **brand loyalty** among millennials (White et al., 2019).

The mediating role of **brand trust** was particularly significant, demonstrating that the effectiveness of social media advertising depends on the extent to which consumers perceive the brand as **credible, authentic, and reliable** (Kuey, 2022; Frontiers, 2024). Millennials who trust Country Delight are more likely to form positive

attitudes toward the brand and exhibit loyal behavior. This supports the idea that marketing strategies must go beyond communication and be reinforced by **verifiable actions and transparency**, to strengthen trust and loyalty.

The strong association between **attitude (trust and engagement) and loyalty intention** is consistent with the **Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)**, which posits that attitude is a major predictor of behavioral intention. The results indicate that positive brand attitudes among millennials can be nurtured through **informative, authentic, and interactive social media campaigns**, leading to higher loyalty intentions.

Demographic analysis revealed that loyalty and trust are influenced by **income and education**, suggesting that awareness, purchasing power, and media literacy are critical factors in shaping millennials' engagement and loyalty toward the brand. This observation is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that consumers' responses to digital marketing are shaped not only by messaging but also by socio-economic factors (Shalender and Sharma, 2021; Li et al., 2022).

However, the study also acknowledges practical limitations. Even with strong marketing and trust-building efforts, external factors such as competing brands, price sensitivity, and availability of products can moderate loyalty behavior. These findings reflect the **attitudinal-behavioral gap**, where positive perceptions and engagement do not always translate into actual purchases or long-term commitment (White et al., 2019).

- **Theoretical Implications**

This research expands the **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** by incorporating **brand trust and customer engagement** as mediators between social media advertising and brand loyalty. It contributes to the literature on **digital marketing and brand management** by providing empirical evidence that trust and engagement are essential mechanisms through which social media marketing fosters loyalty among millennials.

- **Managerial Implications**

- **Transparency and Authenticity:** Marketers should ensure that social media campaigns are transparent, credible, and backed by verifiable brand actions to strengthen trust.
- **Targeted Engagement:** Focused campaigns toward educated and higher-income millennials, who are more responsive to authenticity and brand values, can enhance engagement and loyalty.
- **Integrated Value Proposition:** Combining functional benefits (quality, convenience) with emotional and value-driven messaging (trust, sustainability) can bridge the gap between positive perception and actual loyalty.

- **Collaborative Ecosystems:** Marketers should collaborate with product development and service teams to ensure that marketing promises are supported by real-world experiences, thereby enhancing trust and repeat purchase behavior.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

### Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the impact of **social media advertising** on **brand loyalty** among millennials, with a focus on the mediating role of **brand trust** and the influence of **customer engagement**. Based on the responses of 385 participants, it was found that well-executed social media marketing strategies—such as authentic content, influencer campaigns, interactive posts, and transparent messaging—significantly enhance **brand trust** and **customer engagement**, which in turn strengthen **brand loyalty**.

The study also confirmed that **brand trust acts as a crucial mediator** between social media advertising and loyalty. Millennials who perceive Country Delight as credible, transparent, and authentic demonstrate higher loyalty intentions. Additionally, **customer engagement** was identified as another significant factor contributing to loyalty by fostering emotional attachment and active participation with the brand.

The overall regression model explained **72% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.72$ )** in brand loyalty, indicating a strong predictive relationship among the constructs. However, practical limitations—such as competing brands, price sensitivity, and availability—may prevent high trust and engagement from fully translating into actual purchase behavior, highlighting the presence of an **attitudinal-behavioral gap**.

Overall, the study concludes that **social media advertising is a powerful tool** for cultivating brand trust and engagement, which are essential for building millennial loyalty. Marketing strategies must combine authenticity, transparency, and interactivity to convert positive perceptions into long-term commitment.

### Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for marketers, policymakers, and future researchers:

#### For Marketers

##### Build Brand Trust

Communicate clear, authentic, and verifiable messages through social media, packaging, and brand storytelling to reinforce credibility.

##### Enhance Customer Engagement

Use interactive campaigns, influencer collaborations, contests, and feedback channels to increase emotional attachment and participation.

### Highlight Value Proposition

Integrate both functional benefits (e.g., quality, convenience, healthy products) and emotional/ethical benefits (trust, transparency, sustainability) to appeal to a broader audience.

### Targeted Segmentation

Focus on educated and higher-income millennials initially, who are more responsive to trust-building and engagement messages, then gradually expand outreach to other segments using tailored communication strategies.

### For Policymakers

#### Support Digital Literacy and Awareness

Encourage initiatives that enhance consumer awareness of credible brands and ethical business practices to strengthen trust in online marketing environments.

#### Collaboration with Brands

Work with food brands like Country Delight to promote transparent, ethical, and healthy consumption practices, enhancing public confidence and engagement.

### For Future Research

Future studies can use **larger and more diverse samples** across different regions to enhance generalizability.

**Longitudinal research** can track changes in brand trust and loyalty over time with evolving social media trends.

Additional variables such as **perceived risk, social influence, brand image, or customer satisfaction** can be incorporated to deepen understanding of loyalty formation.

Comparative studies across countries or cultures can provide insights into **cultural influences on the effectiveness of social media marketing** and trust-building strategies.

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